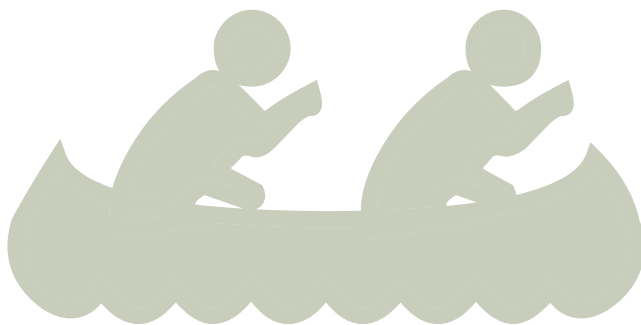


JOHNSTON COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

MOUNTAINS-TO-SEA TRAIL

MASTER PLAN • OCTOBER 2006



PREPARED BY:
GREENWAYS INCORPORATED
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A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S



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PROJECT OVERVIEW

Chapter Outline:

1.0 Statement of Purpose

1.1 North Carolina's Mountains-To-Sea Trail

1.2 Vision for the MST-East Plan

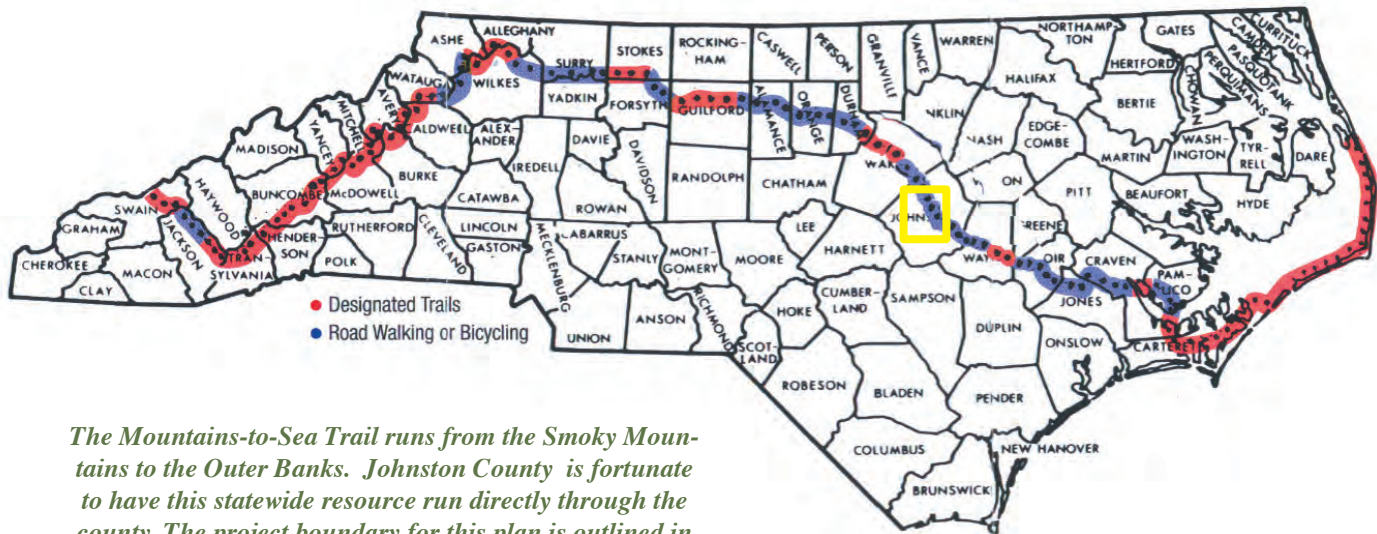
1.3 The MST Planning Process for Johnston County

1.0 Statement of Purpose

In February of 2006, the State of North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources (NCDENR) Division of State Parks, along with North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) Pedestrian and Bicycle Division, the County of Johnston, the Town of Clayton, and the Town of Smithfield, commissioned with Greenways Incorporated to prepare a Master Plan for Johnston County's portion of the statewide Mountains-to-Sea Trail (MST). The purpose of this Master Plan Report is to describe why the trail is needed, what the trail system will entail, and how to make it a reality.

1.1 North Carolina's Mountains-To-Sea Trail (MST)

The MST Master Plan for Johnston County is part of a larger goal for a continuous trail stretching from the Smoky Mountains in the west, to North Carolina's Outer Banks in the east. This trail started in the 1970's when the North Carolina General Assembly passed the North Carolina Trails System Act. The vision was strongly supported by a series of secretaries of the Department of Natural and Community Development. The original plan narrowed the trail's route down to a 20-mile wide corridor, and then called for volunteers across the state to help narrow down the possible trail routes. Since then, volunteers, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private landowners have worked together to complete half of the nearly 1000-mile trail. The MST takes the form of various land based trail types, from footpaths to paved trails, to on-road facilities. Portions of the trail are also water-based, allowing access to rivers for canoeing, kayaking and tubing. While



The Mountains-to-Sea Trail runs from the Smoky Mountains to the Outer Banks. Johnston County is fortunate to have this statewide resource run directly through the county. The project boundary for this plan is outlined in yellow and shown in detail on the following page.

some of the MST has been completed in population centers, the majority of the existing trail lies within State and National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service lands. Allen de Hart, author of *Hiking North Carolina's Mountains-to-Sea Trail*, has this to say about the trail:

“North Carolina’s Mountains-to-Sea Trail offers some of the most rewarding hiking experiences in the East. Covering nearly 1,000 miles, it stretches from Clingman’s Dome, the highest peak in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, to Jockey’s Ridge, the largest sand dune on the Atlantic Coast. The route, a mix of some 500 miles of designated and planned hiking trails and 500 miles of state bicycle paths also used for hiking, winds through three national parks, three national forests, seven state parks, two wilderness areas, and two wildlife refuges, as well as farming communities and small towns.” (de Hart, 2000)

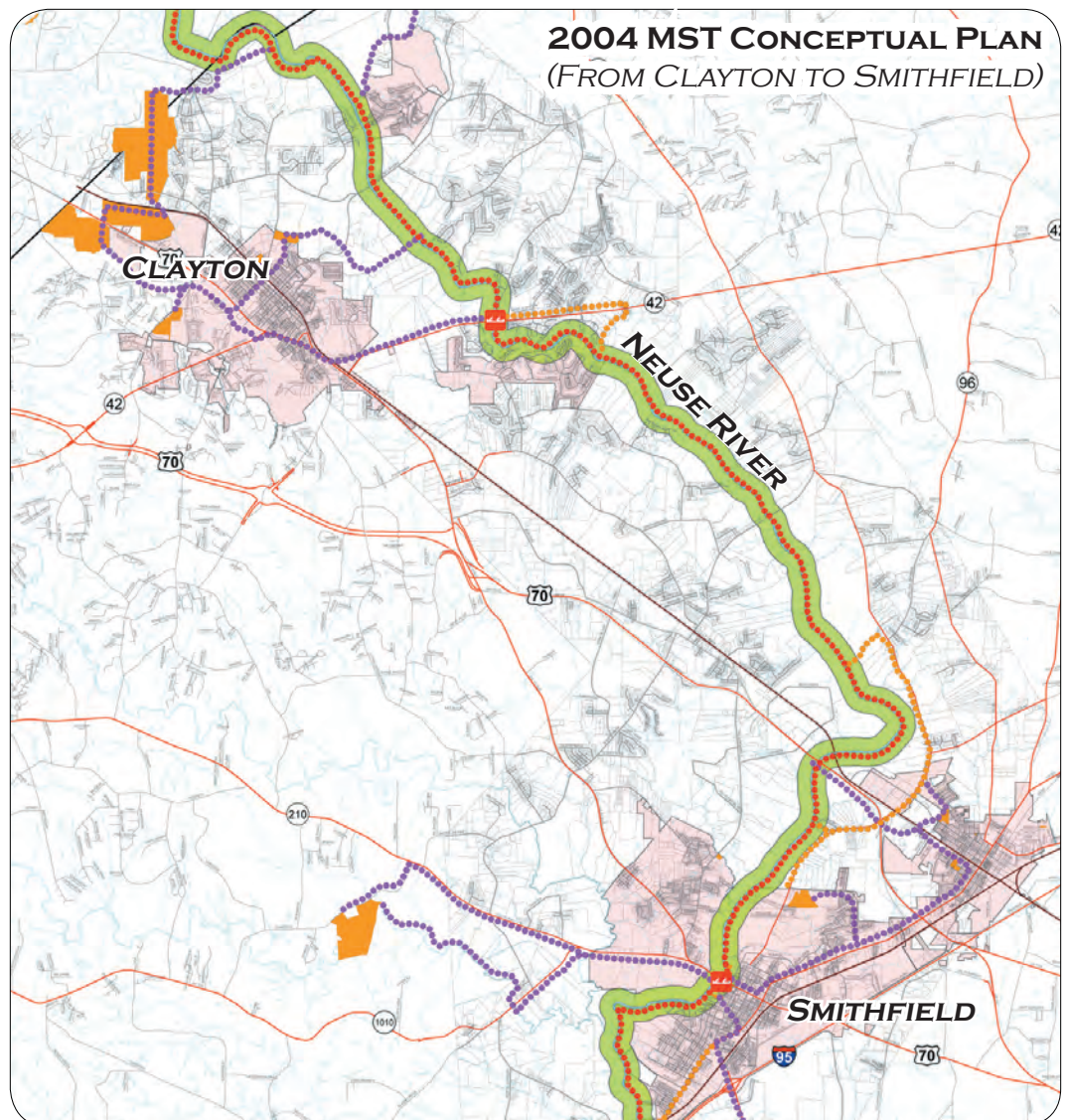
Once completed, North Carolina’s Mountains-to-Sea Trail will become an attraction for hikers and cyclists from all parts of the country, especially for those traveling along the adjoining Appalachian Trail and East Coast Greenway. It will also serve as an economic stimulus for local communities and serve local residents by offering additional transportation and recreation opportunities. In addition to the MST’s economic and recreational benefits, the corridor itself will also protect riparian buffers, provide wildlife habitat, and conserve biological, scenic, cultural, and historical resources of statewide significance (see Chapter 3, Benefits of the MST, for more information on trail and greenway benefits).

1.2 Vision for the MST-East Plan

The MST-East Plan was prepared in 2004, entitled, *A Conceptual Plan for the MST: Falls Lake Dam to Cedar Island*. The Neuse River became the ‘backbone’ of the MST for eastern North Carolina because of the State’s focus on promoting clean water in the Neuse, and because there are a number of local governments along the river with existing or planned greenways.

The MST-East Plan broadly identifies the MST as a 2000’ corridor along the Neuse River (1000’ on each side), highlighting existing trails and water access points, and proposing alternate routes, spur trails, and proposed water access. The 2004 conceptual routes for northwestern Johnston County are shown below. These proposals have been analyzed, modified, and incorporated into the Johnston County MST Plan.

The 2004 MST-East Plan broadly identifies the Johnston County section of the MST as a 2000’ corridor along the Neuse River (shown here in green).



The vision for the trail along the Neuse River was developed through a collaborative planning process involving regional task force meetings, input from existing local greenway plans, farmland protection efforts, and water and land protection efforts. The vision is that of a land and water trail system, featuring a footpath for hiking that could transition to a multi-use trail as it connects through various cities and towns from Wake to Carteret County. The water-based portion is essentially already existing, but needs additional access points and enhanced promotion to realize its potential. The MST-East Plan states the following as part of the vision:

“In years to come, residents and visitors will be able to travel from the State’s Capital through natural areas, historic areas, and scenic areas to the Coast. Stops can be made along the way to shop and visit in the towns and cities that serve as hubs along the route...The completed MST-East will also provide connections to additional trail systems that link to communities and destinations not immediately on the MST route. This will involve collaborative planning among municipal, county, regional, state and federal agencies. Some portions of the trail will serve as protected natural areas. Other alternatives will serve as alternative transportation corridors for walkers or cyclists.” (MST-East Plan, 2004)

The Johnston County MST, from the Town of Clayton to the Town of Smithfield, draws from this vision. This portion of the MST will take the form of a multi-use trail along the Neuse River, connecting the towns and their fast-growing subdivisions through alternative transportation, while at the same time, both protecting the natural environment along the Neuse and drawing economic benefits from both local and regional trail users.

1.3 The MST Planning Process for Johnston County

The following diagram shows the planning process used to develop this plan. The diagram runs chronologically from left to right, outlining the steps taken from February 2006 to September 2006. The primary deliverables included a field report, a preliminary draft plan, the final plan, and presentations.

